DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 496 EC 304 878

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TITLE	Recruiting and Retaining Respite Providers. ARCH Factsheet Number 44.
INSTITUTION	ARCH National Resource Center for Crisis Nurseries and Respite Care Services, Chapel Hill, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Washington, DC. Children's Bureau.
PUB DATE	May 96
CONTRACT	90-CN-0178
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; Children; Compensation (Remuneration); *Disabilities; Incentives; Job Satisfaction; Labor Turnover; Paraprofessional Personnel; *Personnel Needs; Publicity; *Recruitment; *Respite Care

ABSTRACT

This fact sheet offers suggestions for developing recruitment plans and retention strategies to entice and support providers of respite care services for individuals with disabilities and their families. Recruitment strategies include: tapping the program's current providers for referrals; focusing on reaching the greatest number of people in the least amount of time; soliciting involvement of community agencies; utilizing media coverage; and using good design principles in developing posters and brochures. Retention strategies focus on providing training to improve quality of care; encouraging a sense of professionalism and career growth; encouraging on-going support groups; and providing both direct and indirect financial incentives. (DB)

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ED 396 496

ARCH Factsheet Number 44, May, 1996

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Recruiting and Retaining Respite Providers

Introduction

A vital component of any respite or crisis care program is the quality of providers the program is able to attract. Equally important, however, is the program's ability to retain those providers, thus avoiding a never-ending cycle of recruiting and training. Unfortunately, most respite and crisis care programs face the same dilemma as other programs that offer family support and early childhood care and education: the jobs involve high levels of stress, the potential for emotional burnout, and salary levels are not high enough to compensate for these factors. It is possible, however, to develop both recruitment plans and retention strategies that entice and support providers willing to make long-term commitments to children and families.

Recruitment PJans: *How Can We Find Providers?*

Whether a respite program is home-based or center-based, the initial recruiting process is essential to providing quality care. Before beginning, two crucial questions must be addressed: what duties are providers expected to perform, and how will providers learn to fulfill these expectations?

Providers who know and understand the specific expectations of the program before they begin will be more likely to commit to staying with the program. In the same way, providers who are adequately trained to meet the program's expectations feel confident about their abilities and thus are encouraged to remain with the program.

Recruitment is time-consuming, but taking the time to carefully develop a marketing strategy that targets a diverse community is important. By incorporating a number of approaches for recruitment, a program can better attract a quality pool of potential providers.

Tap the program's key resource, its current providers. No one can sell the program better than they, and they may know friends, neighbors, and relatives who should be referred to the program as potential providers.

Concentrate on reaching the greatest number of people in the least amount of time through

- quarter-page flyers inserted in employee paychecks at local utility companies, factories, retail chains, or certain grocery stores
- mailings followed by telephone calls to child care-related agencies and organizations, such as state-licensed or locally-registered providers, child care resource and referral listings, members of child care association, and food reimbursement programs

Let your fingers do the walking and call various community agencies and organizations, including

- service clubs, such as the Kiwanis, Elks, Rotary, Junior League, and Optimist's Clubs
- education groups, such as local Parent/Teacher Associations and the departments of early childhood education or child development at local colleges or universities
- child- and family-related organizations, such as Boys/Girls Clubs, Camp Fire Girls, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, family resource centers, child care associations, YMCA/YWCA, and Girl Scouts/Boy Scouts
- religions groups, women's centers, and senior centers

Remember the importance of media coverage, an obvious but sometimes overlooked recruiting device that also helps to build community awareness. Aim for

- articles or advertisements in local newspapers, either in the community news or lifesty!e sections
- public service announcements or guest interviews on local radio stations and cable and network television

Because the medium is sometimes as important as the message, attention should be given to the appearance of all printed materials developed for the recruiting campaign. To design a poster that will catch the public's attention—

- select a brightly colored background with lettering in a contrasting color

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- add artwork related to children or families, either a photograph or an identifying graphic design (logo)
- include a short, concise message with information specifically detailed for the target audience
- vary the style and size of the font, or type, selectively using bold-faced lettering to highlight critical information
- attach to the poster with rubber cement a stack of business-size cards, which can be torn off and replaced as needed, containing pertinent information about the program and the name and phone number of the contact person

The poster's design can also be duplicated onto brochures or flyers, and these then distributed by mail or in person to community agencies and organizations, the media, various businesses, and others.

Retention Strategies: *How Can We Keep Providers?*

Experience has shown that even limited training for providers can greatly improve the quality of care for children. At the same time, opportunities for professional development can be a major incentive for respite providers to remain with a program. If carefully structured, training programs can give providers a sense of professionalism, empowerment, and career growth, all strong incentives to stay with a job.

When developing a training plan

- Identify requisite skills and design trainings to teach those skills.
- Schedule events at times that are convenient for providers. This may take a great deal of creativity and will involve a number of decisions—Will training be held in the day or evening? Will it be spread over several days or weeks, or consolidated into one or two days? Will it take place on weekdays, weekends, or a combination of both?
- Make child care available at the training site, or reimburse trainees for the cost of off-site child care for their child(ren). This is especially important when training providers for in-home care.
- Organize training in such a way that it promotes cohesive, supportive relationships among providers. This will encourage the providers themselves to develop a learning community of shared ideas and mutual emotional support.
- Offer one-on-one, problem-solving assistance to individual providers. Whether a respite program is center-based or home-based, providers need to be able to consult with others regarding important issues affecting children, especially those with challenging behaviors.
- Encourage monthly support group meetings for providers by offering space and refreshments in a relaxed atmosphere. Let providers decide whether meetings will focus on specific topics or be an opportunity to exchange ideas. Either way, make sure discussions are positive and centered on solutions—gripe sessions are counter-productive!

Financial incentives can also increase the retention rate for providers. These include both direct incentives, such as clearly defined schedules for pay raises, and indirect incentives, such as paid vacation and medical leaves, family leave time, medical and pension benefits, and automatic savings plans.

Summary

Rather than just "baby-sitting" or performing only menial tasks, providers need to be recognized for their strengths and encouraged to develop professionally. Take time to mentor providers so they can speak publicly about the program and assist with recruiting. In this way, providers not only develop self-esteem but also lighten the work load for the staff.

Providers who know and believe they are vital to a program will become the program's best advocates, encouraging others to become providers as well. Offering providers regularly scheduled training sessions and one-on-one technical assistance not only enhances individual caregiving skills but also helps professionalize the child care field.

Resource

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This factsheet was produced by the ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau—Cooperative Agreement No. 90-CN-0178 under contract with the North Carolina Department of Human Resources, Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services, Child and Family Services Section, Raleigh, North Carolina. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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